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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE
PRESENT HIGH PRICE OF
PROVISIONS.

IN A LETTER TO THE LORD LIEUTENANT AND
INHABITANTS OF HAMPSHIRE.

By JOHN DUTHY, Esq.

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ORIGINALS

TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE

PROVOST

A LETTER TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE

THE LORDS OF PARLIAMENT



BY JOHN LUTHE

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OBSERVATIONS, &c.

MY LORD,

AS the Representative of your Sovereign in this County, it is the Duty of your Lordship's high office to maintain its Peace and Welfare.: It is the Interest of all its Inhabitants that the one should be duly maintained, and the other clearly understood. To your Lordship, and to them, I therefore address the following Observations, calculated, I trust, to promote these important objects, both here, and through the Country at large.

THE year 1800 will long be remembered, by the excessive dearness of every article of life. The grievous pressure induced thereby, in which we have all a common share of
sufferance,

sufferance, makes it the duty, as well as interest, of every man, who has leisure for the attempt, to endeavour to trace out the productive causes of this overwhelming evil. It becomes the more necessary to do this, as the lower classes of society can only feel their misery, without knowing how to remove it. They have no time to search out the origin of the burthen they groan under. Their daily labour is inadequate to supply their daily wants. This is an evil they all must feel, and in their hasty efforts to relieve themselves from it, we must not wonder if their movements are irregular, ill-directed, and destructive to themselves, and others.

To prevent the ill consequences of lawless tumults; to secure to the farmer, and corn-merchant, the free and uninterrupted exercise of his trade; I address to my fellow-countrymen the following observations. I exhort them to peaceable and orderly conduct, lest they aggravate the evil which they are endeavouring to remove; and I entreat their attention while I attempt to direct it to the true source of
our

our misfortunes, and point their exertions to the only legal and effectual remedy.

Though there is not an article of life whose price is not exorbitant, yet as wheaten bread may be considered as the principal staff, and support, of man's existence, I chiefly direct my remarks towards the cause of its excessive dearness, considering occasionally the price of other grain and commodities, as they happen to be connected with my first, and principal, object.

All the various causes which have been assigned for the present high price of provisions may be reduced to four heads.

I. An Increased Consumption.

II. A Diminished Produce.

III. An Increase in the Expense of raising that Produce.

IV. A Monopoly.

It shall be my endeavour to shew how far these causes of dearness exist; to trace the minor, or secondary, causes, of whose joint influence they are the effects; and to see whether there be not a master evil, from whose tainted spring all these waters

of bitterness flow. Then, having analysed the poison, we shall soon arrive at the knowledge of its proper antidote.

I. It is to me most evident that a very great increase has taken place within these few years in the consumption of the most material articles of life. I attribute this, in some degree, to our increased population. I have not sufficient documents whereon to found a judgment of the rate of this increase; but, at all events, it must have been gradual, and would naturally accommodate itself to the increase of subsistence, which the island afforded; so that, I do not conceive, it can have had any very considerable share in the great, and sudden, rise in the price of corn, which has been lately experienced.

The influx of foreigners has also increased our consumption.

I do not know the number of foreigners now resident in England, but, whatever it may be, they are a dead weight, being, for the most, unproductive members of society, and, in general, eating more bread than the

the same number of Englishmen. Perhaps however these two sources of consumption may be fully balanced by our importation of foreign corn.

There is yet another source of consumption remaining; our immense military force, our army and navy.

We have 112,000 seamen, and twice as many soldiers, to feed. It may be said, they must equally be fed if they were not soldiers and sailors. I grant it.* But, not to mention that if they were husbandmen, or artificers, their labour would be productive, I will simply ask, can such a body of men be fed, without great, and enormous, waste? When every one caters for himself, he provides no more than he can consume; but, when provision is made for collected numbers, waste must inevitably ensue.

Large bodies of troops have, at various times during the war, been assembled, either to proceed on secret expeditions, or

* This only applies to the article of bread; day-labourers in husbandry, as will be shewn hereafter, get little or no meat and beer, while soldiers and sailors have plenty of both.

remain stationary in camps and barracks. For their support corn must be collected in magazines and storehouses; it must be conveyed from distant parts to the spot where it is to be consumed; and in its removal by land, or water, must be exposed to the chance of being spoiled. If it escapes this hazard, will none of it get musty, or overheated, or be destroyed by vermin in the storehouses? If it be said, government has no storehouses, it is supplied by the contractor. I answer, that I care not whether the storehouses are called the contractor's, or government's: They must be filled to answer its demands, and, when filled, their contents must often be damaged by various accidents. If the nature of the thing did not demonstrate that this must inevitably be the case, I would pledge myself to prove that large quantities of corn have thus been wasted, in the merchants or contractors hands, and rendered unfit for the food of man.

I blame not the merchant, or contractor, for this: If ministers plan an expedition, and give notice to the contractor, that on
such

such a day they shall want such a quantity of corn, it is his business to collect it together. If afterwards ministers delay, or relinquish, their expedition, the corn may be spoiled, but the contractor has done his duty.

Let us however suppose thst the expedition sails at the appointed time, and the corn for its support well got on board: Is none of it spoiled on its passage? Are none of the vessels, that transport it, lost at sea, or stranded with their cargoes? Are none of them taken by the enemy? In the wantonness of victory is no corn wasted? In the confusion of retreat is none left behind? These are questions which the plain sense of every man can solve, and to it I leave their solution.

In the Naval department the waste of corn must be greater, from the hazards of the sea to which it is perpetually exposed. Salt water and vermin make continual depredations: tempest, fire, and the enemy, too often destroy the provision of hundreds.

That the hurry and confusion of suddenly victualling a fleet must necessarily create
great

great waste, must be obvious to every one ; and the fact must be particularly notorious to him who has lived in the neighbourhood of a large sea-port, and remembers the tons of damaged biscuit, or bread-dust as it is called, which is continually disposed of as food for dogs, pigs, and poultry.

If it appears from the foregoing observations that a considerable increase has taken place in the consumption of wheat, it will be found to be infinitely greater in oats, and hay, in barley, and butcher's meat.

With respect to oats, and hay, the increase in the number of regiments of regular cavalry, and the numberless bodies of volunteers, that have been raised throughout the kingdom, together with the establishment of Flying Artillery, Royal Waggon Trains, Bat-Horses, and others necessarily attendant on Camps ; and lastly, the damage and waste, that must ensue in the collection and transportation of forage, in the various expeditions to the Continent, to India, and elsewhere, will sufficiently account for the increased consumption of these articles.

If we turn our eyes to the increased
consumption

consumption of barley, and butcher's meat, the obvious cause must flash upon us like lightning.

In time of peace, our naval establishment consists of from *twelve to fifteen thousand sailors* :—We have now *one hundred and twelve thousand* ! The land forces of these kingdoms, in time of peace, amount to about *forty thousand* men, including troops, and garrisons, in Ireland, Gibraltar, the East Indies, and America : The number of troops at present in our pay, does not, I conceive,* fall short of *two hundred*

* I have taken this statement of the military, and marine, forces of Great Britain, and Ireland, from Playfair's Translation of Boetticher's Statistical Tables of Europe, which I have chosen for my guide, because being published under the direct patronage of the Royal Family, and having many even of the Public Offices of State among the subscribers to it, I conclude it cannot but be correct. The land forces of the kingdom are thus enumerated in the Supplementary Table :

97 regiments of foot.

36 regiments of cavalry.

4 battalions of artillery men.

32,000 militia.

26,000

hundred thousand men !! Indeed the author referred to in the note estimates our whole naval and military force at nearly *half a million* of men: from which if we deduct 152,000, the number of our volunteers who maintain themselves, and 55,000 for our peace establishment by land, and sea, there remain nearly TWO HUNDRED AND NINETY-THREE THOUSAND *unproductive members of society, to be provided for, more than in time of Peace !!!*

Let us suppose that ninety-three thousand of these, when maintaining themselves, are above the situation of daily labour and poverty. The remaining surplus belongs to the class of labourers, peasants, and lower artificers, who, when maintaining themselves by their own industry, consume little

26,000 volunteer cavalry.

120,000 ditto infantry.

1,000 ditto artillery men,

5,000 naval fencibles.

Estimating each regiment at 1000, the whole makes 319,000, besides marines, and foreign troops in English service. The force in all is little under half a million.

beer,

beer, and less butcher's meat. That this is the situation of the labouring poor, every man must know, who is at all conversant with it. That our sailors, and soldiers, are supplied with plenty of meat, and beer, every man's daily observation must inform him. Nay in such plenty is the soldier maintained that he will purchase of the butcher none but the prime joints of meat. I do not blame him for this—I envy, I re-pine at, no man's comfort: but when I see the soldier culling the produce of a butcher's shop, I cannot but feel a wish that the labourer could get some of those inferior parts which are rejected, to season his daily bread. Thus far I only feel emotions of regret. But when I pass along the streets of a garrison, or market town, or walk around the borders of a camp, and observe the soldiery engaged in drunken brawls, or wallowing on the ground, the filthy victims of gin and other ardent spirits; then, then, I own a stronger emotion than regret is excited, and I glow with indignation to see the food of the labouring part of the community intemperately swallowed,

swallowed, in the form of liquid poison, by some of its unproductive members.* I will say no more on this disgraceful subject; the remembrance of it would excite some of the warmth, its sight has heretofore inspired.

What has been said of the spoil and waste of grain when collected in quantities, is doubly true of butcher's meat. When cattle are assembled either at land, or on ship-board, their confinement is productive of distemper. In addition to this, the difficulty of supplying collected numbers with food, makes it necessary to shorten their allowance, or to use inferior fodder; this is an aggravation of the disorders occasioned by confinement, which seldom fails to render them infectious. Contagion once established spreads most rapidly amongst cattle closely confined and badly fed, and the ravages occasioned thereby are of the most serious and destructive nature, and must much have increased the consumption and waste of our vast navy, and amphibious expeditions.

* It is to be considered how much this consumption of ardent spirits by the soldiery, increases, in the worst possible way, the consumption of grain.

Another

Another circumstance to be considered as making a part of the increased consumption of butcher's meat, is the necessity induced by the increased demand for it, of killing cattle before they have attained their proper growth; and thus, much valuable food is lost to the nation.

The increased demand for animal food has also a retro-active operation, and contributes to increase the consumption, and enhance the price of barley, oats, and hay, and every other sort of food for cattle.

Combining therefore all these different facts; an increase of population; the influx of foreigners; the waste, damage, and loss, which must happen in supplying with bread our immense navy and army; the additional number of horses kept in our regular and volunteer cavalry; the extra-quantity of meat, beer, and ardent spirits, now consumed by two hundred thousand sailors and soldiers, who, when not employed as such, consume but little of either; together with the other subordinate causes I have mentioned; they will sufficiently demonstrate the existence of that Increased Consumption,

sumption, which I stated to have taken place.

II. The second general cause of scarcity, or dearness, may arise two ways. A Diminished Produce may be owing either to the Act of Man or to the Act of Providence. A less quantity of grain may be sown than formerly, and fewer cattle bred; or the seasons may be unpropitious to man's efforts; the plants of the earth may wither up in barrenness, and the beasts of the field be smitten with distemper, and die.

Although I own I have not sufficient documents whereon to form an accurate judgment, yet viewing the subject in a general way, I do not conceive the exertions of man to have been wanting, in endeavouring to produce the food of man. But I do believe that these attempts have not increased in proportion to the increased demand. The additional quantity of land brought into cultivation, and the number of cattle bred, have not kept pace with the demands of the market. Of some articles perhaps there has been rather a decreased cultivation. That
chief

chief and most necessary food of man, to the causes of whose dearness I chiefly direct my attention, has been supposed, by some husbandmen with whom I have conversed, to have been less an object of cultivation lately, in comparison with other grain, than formerly. This, I own, at first surprised me; for I conceived that the high price which wheat has for some time past obtained, would be sufficient to secure even its increased culture. But on farther consideration there were some circumstances which induced me to hesitate in my judgment. Not pretending therefore to decide on a subject concerning which I can gather but partial, and uncertain, information, I will shortly state the considerations that influenced my opinion.

It is notorious to every one, however slight his acquaintance with rural œconomy, that the cultivation of wheat is more expensive than that of other grain; and accordingly the price is proportionably dearer. When I say *proportionably*, I mean that it is always tending towards the true proportion, though sometimes it may be considerably above, and at others as considerably below

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it. Supposing therefore the true proportion to obtain, and the superior price of wheat over that of other grain to be no more than sufficient to repay the superior expense of producing it; and that a farmer with a given capital, viz. 500*l.* can cultivate a given number of acres of wheat, in a proper and substantial manner; it follows, that if the farmer's capital is reduced by the high price of labour, by taxes, and by parochial assessments, he cannot cultivate so many acres of wheat as before; or, if he does, must do it imperfectly, and in either case the produce will be diminished. If the farmer sows less wheat, the produce will of course be less; if he sows the same number of acres with less tillage, and less manure, the crop will be proportionably bad; and if he throws some of his grounds, which should, in the due course of husbandry, have been sown with wheat, into oats, or barley, the case will be still worse; because such crops deteriorate the soil, and render it unfit for the production of wheat for a long space of time. This however is what he will probably be tempted to do if the true proportion, or a greater, obtains between

tween the prices of wheat, and that of other grain. I cannot pretend to determine what this true proportion is; but am inclined to think that the increase in the consumption of barley, and oats, in the various ways before mentioned, exceeds that of wheat, and therefore their proportional price is probably exceeded also. These circumstances therefore *may* have induced farmers to cultivate a smaller quantity of wheat in proportion to other grain.

It is probable that there is more grain produced in the kingdom than there was ten years ago; although many very experienced agriculturists assert, that the conversion of down land into arable has in many instances produced the contrary effect, by diminishing the number of sheep, to whose manure in many countries wheat land particularly must owe its fertility.

I pretend not to decide on this; but there is another circumstance which has certainly, within these few years, robbed the plough of some valuable land. The same evil which rendered Italy barren in the days of Augustus and Tiberius, has now made no small progress in England. The luxury

of the age has swelled every paltry fishing town into a Baiaë, surrounded with its gardens and villas; on every public road Tusculums, and Sabine farms, display their walks and shubberies, alas! not tenanted by Horaces, or Tullies; and the most fertile countries are covered with mansions, from the Nabob's palace, to the "Cit's country box," surrounded by parks, paddocks, or lawns. A sort of calenture seems to have seized every merchant and citizen, and as soon as he gets a few pounds in his pocket, like Falstaff, "a babbles of green fields." Nay more, he must make green fields where he finds none; and though the arid hue of his lawn too frequently mocks the impotence of wealth, yet is he determined if it will not bear grass, it shall not bear corn, and excludes for ever from the pale of his domain the plough, and its productive labours. This however I mention incidentally, rather as a matter whose consequences may hereafter be alarming, than as one which at present is of magnitude sufficient to weigh much in the scale.

Having given these few hints I shall venture to hazard an opinion that the quantity
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of grain sown in the kingdom is not *much* increased of late, and that perhaps the proportion of wheat to other grain is rather diminished. I state this however merely as a loose opinion, and shall be glad to be corrected on the subject.

With respect to that other source of diminished produce, unfavourable seasons; the crop of 1799 was beyond a doubt very scanty in every sort of grain; that of the present year, though rather above mediocrity,* is by no means what our hopes led us to expect, and will not compensate the deficiency of the former. The report of old wheat being abundant in the country I am fully convinced is totally unfounded. I will not enlarge any farther on this head, as it turns on a mere matter of fact which every man's observation will better explain

* The Duke of Portland, whose information ought to be much better than mine, states, in his letter to the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, that this year's crop is not more than three-fourths of an average produce. I own from the appearance of grain in the Southern parts of England, and the accounts I have received from the North, I did conceive that it had much exceeded this proportion.

than the most elaborate arguments. On the whole therefore I shall only say that a diminution of produce appears to have taken place, chiefly owing to bad seasons.

III. It will require very few words to demonstrate the existence of the third general cause of dearness—The Increased Expence of raising Corn and other Necessaries of Life.

The component parts of the price of any thing being higher, the money price itself must of course be higher. Adam Smith clearly shews that the component parts of the price of corn are, Rent, Labour, and Profits of Stock. How much Rent is increased every one knows; the increase in the rate of Labour is also obvious enough; for in those places where the nominal price is not much increased, it is made up by allowances of corn, or parochial assessments; for both these must be considered as making part of the price of labour. As to the rise in the price of all those articles which constitute the Stock of a Farm, that also is notorious enough; and though it is for the most part originally *the effect* of
of

of the high price of corn, yet when once the high price of these articles is established, it becomes in its turn *a cause* of the continuance of the high price of corn. It acts reciprocally as cause and effect.

I have said that a rise in the value of stock is *for the most part* the effect of the rise of corn; because it is not *altogether*, or *always* so.

Duties and taxes, imposed by government, frequently occasion a very considerable rise in the price of commodities, without the concurrence of any other cause. For instance, Port wine is raised to three or four times the value of its prime cost, by duties imposed on it. So when a tax falls on any commodity which composes part of a farmer's stock, he is obliged to raise the price of his corn, in order to gain the same profit as before. Thus the taxes on horses used in husbandry, on malt, on bricks and tiles, on stamps and receipts, on salt, on leather, on soap, on candles, on houses and windows, &c. are *originally* causes of an increase in the price of corn, by diminishing the farmer's profits, and

obliging him to reimburse himself by an additional charge to the consumer.

That heavy imposition under which the nation now groans, the Income Tax, has more particularly this effect, by striking directly at the farmer's profits, of which his income consists. It was matter of joy and exultation to many when this tax was made to fall more heavily on farmers: "These rich rogues shall now contribute to the burthens of the state," was the general cry. In truth it was a silly cry. They may be rich, nay, they may be rogues, for aught I know: but if they are, when Mr. Pitt fleeces them, they will most assuredly fleece the nation, and reimburse themselves, by increasing the price of corn.

I must not however be understood to say that they are rogues for this; but merely, whether they are, or not, this is what must necessarily happen in any trade. If ten per cent, for instance, is the usual profit of trade, and it is loaded with an impost of five per cent, the consumer must pay fifteen per cent. in order to give the trader his former profit, which he will not fail to demand.

Indeed

Indeed I know of no one to whom this tax can be matter of real exultation, but to the minister and his allies (if he has any); he may get some millions, to squander on them; but, if this sum were raised by a double tax on farmers, it would only be a double tax on the great body of the people, who must all eat corn, and in its price must repay, *with interest*, the sum which the grower has advanced to government. I say, *with interest*, because either in his trade as a farmer, or in a direct loan to an individual, or to government, his money would bring interest; and he is clearly a loser if he gains not the same, when he advances it in the shape of a tax. So that by a tax on farmers, which is in fact a tax on corn, the people not only pay an additional income tax, but interest on it besides.

I trust, the Increase in the Expence of raising corn, and its pernicious tendency, is sufficiently demonstrated. That a similar increase in the expense of producing every other article of life must follow as a consequence, is too apparent to require proof.

IV. It only remains therefore to enquire
whether

whether the fourth and last cause of dearness exist—Monopoly.

To this the popular clamour has always pointed as the sole, or at least chief, operative cause of the present dearness ; and many grave and high personages have not failed to re-echo it from their exalted stations. This again is an idle clamour ; unfounded, and unjust, with respect to the objects against which it has been directed. Much has been said, and well said, by the advocates who on this occasion have stepped forward to defend the cause of the growers and dealers in corn ; but I know not how I can so clearly, and satisfactorily, shew the improbability, not to say impossibility, of combination among farmers, or corn-merchants, as by transcribing the words of Adam Smith, in whom is to be found the substance of every thing that has lately been said on the subject.

“ The interest of the inland dealer, and that of the great body of the people, how opposite soever they may at first sight appear, are, even in years of the greatest scarcity, exactly the same. It is his interest to raise the price of his corn as high as the real scarcity of the season requires, and it can never be his interest to
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raise it higher. By raising the price he discourages the consumption, and puts every body more or less, but particularly the inferior ranks of people, upon thrift and good management. If, by raising it too high, he discourages the consumption so much that the supply of the season is likely to go beyond the consumption of the season, and to last for some time after the next crop begins to come in, he runs the hazard, not only of losing a considerable part of his corn by natural causes, but of being obliged to sell what remains of it for much less than what he might have had for it several months before. If by not raising the price high enough he discourages the consumption so little, that the supply of the season is likely to fall short of the consumption of the season, he not only loses a part of the profit which he might otherwise have made, but he exposes the people to suffer, before the end of the season, instead of the hardships of a dearth, the dreadful horrors of a famine. It is the interest of the people that their daily, weekly, and monthly consumption, should be proportioned as exactly as possible to the supply of the season. The interest of the inland corn-dealer is the same. By supplying them, as nearly as he can judge, in this proportion, he is likely to sell all his corn for the highest price, and with the greatest profit; and his knowledge of the state of the crop, and of his daily, weekly, and monthly sales, enables him to judge, with more or less accuracy, how far they really are supplied in this manner. Without intending the interest of the people, he is necessarily led, by a regard to his own interest, to treat them, even in years of scarcity, pretty much in the same manner as the prudent master of a vessel

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is sometimes obliged to treat his crew. When he foresees that provisions are likely to run short, he puts them upon short allowance. Though from excess of caution he should sometimes do this without any real necessity, yet all the inconveniencies which his crew can thereby suffer are inconsiderable, in comparison of the danger, misery, and ruin, to which they might sometimes be exposed by a less provident conduct. Though from excess of avarice, in the same manner, the inland corn merchant should sometimes raise the price of his corn somewhat higher than the scarcity of the season requires, yet all the inconveniencies which the people can suffer from this conduct, which effectually secures them from a famine in the end of the season, are inconsiderable, in comparison of what they might have been exposed to by a more liberal way of dealing in the beginning of it. The corn merchant himself is likely to suffer the most by this excess of avarice; not only from the indignation which it generally excites against him, but, though he should escape the effects of this indignation, from the quantity of corn which it necessarily leaves upon his hands in the end of the season, and which, if the next season happens to prove favourable, he must always sell for a much lower price than he might otherwise have had.

“Were it possible, indeed, for one great company of merchants to possess themselves of the whole crop of an extensive country, it might, perhaps, be their interest to deal with it as the Dutch are said to do with the spiceries of the Moluccas, to destroy or throw away a considerable part of it, in order to keep up the price of the rest. But it is scarce possible, even
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by the violence of law, to establish such an extensive monopoly with regard to corn; and, wherever the law leaves the trade free, it is of all commodities the least liable to be engrossed or monopolized by the force of a few large capitals, which buy up the greater part of it. Not only its value far exceeds what the capitals of a few private men are capable of purchasing, but supposing they were capable of purchasing it, the manner in which it is produced renders this purchase altogether impracticable. As in every civilized country it is the commodity of which the annual consumption is the greatest, so a greater quantity of industry is annually employed in producing corn than in producing any other commodity. When it first comes from the ground too, it is necessarily divided among a greater number of owners than any other commodity; and these owners can never be collected into one place like a number of independent manufacturers, but are necessarily scattered through all the different corners of the country. These first owners either immediately supply the consumers in their own neighbourhood, or they supply other inland dealers who supply those consumers. The inland dealers in corn therefore, including both the farmer and the baker, are necessarily more numerous than the dealers in any other commodity, and their dispersed situation renders it altogether impossible for them to enter into any general combination. If in a year of scarcity, therefore, any of them should find that he had a good deal more corn upon hand than, at the current price, he could hope to dispose of before the end of the season, he would never think of keeping up this price

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to his own loss, and to the sole benefit of his rivals and competitors, but would immediately lower it, in order to get rid of his corn before the new crop began to come in. The same motives, the same interests, which would thus regulate the conduct of any one dealer, would regulate that of every other, and oblige them all in general to sell their corn at the price which, according to the best of their judgment, was most suitable to the scarcity or plenty of the season."

The apology which Dr. Smith unnecessarily makes for the length of his digression, of which the foregoing pages are part, must be my excuse for the length of my quotation, viz. the great importance of the subject. I trust that it will convince every one, who shall turn over these pages with an unprejudiced mind, that farmers, and dealers in corn, *if left to themselves*, have it not in their power to form combinations to any extent; and that unless a monopoly could be so extensive as to embrace nearly the whole crop of the country, it is not even consistent with their interest. Can it be necessary, is it indeed possible, to add any thing to the above clear and unanswerable reasoning? Is there any man who while he admits the truth of the statement in the abstract, thinks that when practically
applied

applied to the present times it fails? and that the present awful and portentous crisis forms an anomaly in the history of mankind which cannot be tried by any known laws of reason? that it is a time when the avaricious and unfeeling will starve the poor in order to impoverish themselves? and when, in direct contradiction to every principle of human nature, and self-interest, men prefer loss of money and reputation, to applause and wealth? If any such there be, who led away by prejudice remains unconvinced by the reasoning of Adam Smith, I request him to let his own experience be his monitor, and convince himself. Let him look attentively round his own parish, let him scrutinize the conduct of the farmers who reside in it, and then let him honestly declare if he can even find a rope of sand, that links together this much talked of combination. He must own that he cannot, I am certain.

But perhaps he may be inclined to think that this is owing to the particular circumstances which obtain in his parish, such as its being composed of small and middling farmers whose finances will not admit of
any

any delay in returning their capital. If so, let me tell him the state of the parish in which I reside. It is composed chiefly of opulent yeomen who reside on, and cultivate, their own property. Among these men, who are also possessed, the greater part of them at least, of considerable capitals, there is so little combination, that very few are in the habit of seeing each other, except at market ; and so little does a spirit even of union actuate them, that they are not at this moment agreed as to the rate of the wages of labour ; one part of the parish continuing the old rate of nine shillings per week, and the other part having advanced it to twelve.

If I compare the conduct of the parish in which I reside with that of others in the neighbourhood, still less can I see symptoms of a mutual understanding. At a village not four miles distant the price of bread has been cheaper than with me, and not much farther off, it has been dearer. In a contiguous parish, some of the principal growers allow their labourers wheat at a reduced price, others make no such allowance ; in the parish where I live, again, some allow
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their labourers beer, others give money without any *douceur*. Even when the harvest was just ripe for the sickle, and it was more particularly the interest of the farmers to come to an understanding on the subject of wages, the same discordancy prevailed; and though a vestry was held for the purpose of settling so material a circumstance, no unanimity could be obtained, and every one departed resolved to follow his own opinion. Let it be remembered that this want of union took place among moneyed men, to whom, if to any, combination would be possible, and advantageous; and let every man reflect whether more or less the same thing has not taken place within the circle of his own vicinity, and then let him say whether competition, and *not combination*, must not result from such discordant materials.

But perhaps some may say, all this is very true; iniquity is sharp-sighted, and subtle; we cannot detect her secret operations, they are too well concealed; but we cannot be convinced that they do not exist; we cannot persuade ourselves there is no monopolist in the country.—If they insist

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on this, and are bent on discovering this unknown monopolist, I will give them a hint or two that may assist them in their search.

It is agreed on all hands that, whoever he be, he must be possessed of an immense capital. Now I know but of one man who has the command of a capital sufficient for the purposes of monopoly; and that man is the PRIME MINISTER. He undoubtedly with the capital of the country at his beck, is able to monopolize the whole crop of the country; but I do not suspect him of doing any such thing; I do not mean to accuse him of any design to starve the country, because—it is not his Interest. I merely mean to state, that he must monopolize to a certain extent in order to feed the two hundred thousand unproductive myrmidons with which he has surrounded himself. That so large a body of men can be supplied with provisions without materially enhancing their price, is totally impossible. A degree of monopoly must be carried on by the different agents of government. Even if the same quantity of food was consumed by the same body of men, when
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maintaining themselves, (which has before been shewn not to be the case) there is a material difference between the silent and imperceptible operation of supplying the wants of two hundred thousand individuals, catering each for himself, when and where he can best be supplied ; and that of satisfying the imperious necessities of the same number collected into large bodies. An individual is supplied from day to day, and from hour to hour ; if he cannot purchase to advantage at this market, he will go to another ; if this day's price is high, he will wait in hopes of its being lower, or at all events will buy no more than will satisfy his present want. Can any prudent, can any rational man pursue the same conduct in providing for the maintenance of an army ? Will any one but a madman, or a traitor, risk the hazard of it ? In fact, does ever any Minister of War, General, or Commissary, so act ? If they do, they deserve capital punishment. But in truth they never do—they do not trust as individuals do, the supply of the day to the morning that ushers it in—no nor, if they are wise, to the week, or month that precedes it—they calculate

the wants of those they have to maintain, for a long time before hand; they form magazines and depots; and in order to fill them must, and do, pay any price to which the articles of consumption may be raised, by their necessity on one hand, and the conscience of the seller on the other. And what is the consequence of this? Why, it not only fixes the price of corn at a rate not less than that which government has been obliged to pay, but, by withdrawing large quantities from particular markets, eventually raises the price much higher. It is true, that if great part of the produce of a particular spot is bought up for troops that are assembled in its neighbourhood, a supply may be introduced from other parts where no such drain has taken place. But it is to be considered that this corn must be sold at an advanced price, because, to its original value, must be added the cost and hazard of transporting it from a distance.

Has the conduct of government in fact been such as I have above stated? I think whoever examines will find that it has. I had written nearly the whole of the foregoing pages before the Duke of Portland's letters,

letters, on the subject of the present high price of provisions, fell into my hands. In them I see a confirmation of what I have said; for his Grace there avows, and recommends, that conduct which government must necessarily put in practice, with such numbers as it has to feed. The Duke of Portland expressly says, *farmers must be encouraged to bring their corn to market, with perfect security, at whatever price they please to fix on the article.* This is precisely the conduct that I have said a minister, who has two hundred thousand men to feed, must adopt; and accordingly, we see he does adopt it.

In a tract lately published, intitled, "An Address to the good Sense and Candour of the People in behalf of the Dealers in Corn," (which has been much praised and quoted in the ministerial prints of the day, and which in truth contains much good sense) it is stated that a Noble Lord, more than usually conversant in matters of Trade, urged as a proof of the Monopolizing Conduct of millers and mealmen, that Mr. Claude Scott, an agent of government, could at one time buy 40,000 sacks of flour.

The author of the Pamphlet clearly refutes this charge of Monopoly, as affecting the millers and mealmen ; but, as the purchase of 40,000 sacks of flour is sufficient to shew the power and practice of monopoly to exist somewhere, it follows that if the millers and mealmen were not monopolists, the other party to the contract must be, viz. government. Forty thousand sacks of flour will feed all the inhabitants of London for a fortnight ; and it is evident enough that whoever is able, and actually does get possession of a fortnight's food for the metropolis of the kingdom, is in truth and effect a very extensive monopolist.

Let me state one other fact, which I am enabled to do from indubitable authority. In truth part of the circumstance fell under my own observation. In the month of November 1799, ministers, alarmed at the prospect of a very scanty supply of wheat, dispatched the gentleman before mentioned into the North of Germany, and the Countries bordering on the Baltic, with orders to buy up all the grain he could by any means procure, at any price ; and for the support of so extensive a transaction the purse of the nation was to be answerable.

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This surely smells strongly of Monopoly. But its effects may be supposed to have been only felt in their operation on the price of foreign corn. No such thing. I have before said that farmers and corn-merchants, *if left to themselves*, have it not in their power, nor is it their interest, to attempt Monopoly. This is true; but, by the operation and interference of government, there is a connecting tie, which makes a combination where there would otherwise be none. The effect of the transaction above stated was this:—The extraordinary commission, which government had given to their agent, was whispered among some of the principal dealers in corn; and it was no sooner known, than every man hastened to purchase every bushel of grain he could by any means come at; tours were made through the corn counties by dealers and their agents, and purchases entered into to any extent and at any price; every man being fully convinced, that the demands of government would enable him to dispose of all the corn he could buy to advantage. The event justified these conjectures; not a dealer, I

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believe,

believe, had reason to repent of his bargains; but corn was raised to an immense price, at which, with little variation, it has ever since continued.

What I have here stated may be considered as a sort of supplement to the Duke of Portland's official letters; who, after exculpating farmers and dealers in corn from the charge of Monopoly, with a laudable attention to one of the first principles of Law, (*oh! si sic omnia*) by which *no man is bound to accuse himself*, has left it for me to inform the world who this so much talked of Monopolist is; his Grace having only declared who is not. I trust I have now done this; and moreover presume to think that I have demonstrated the existence, and shewn the operation, to a greater or less degree, of the four general causes of the present high price of provisions, which I stated in the outset.

Having done this, I will proceed to enquire whether there be not a common source of mischief, a central point of evil from whence these radii diverge. I have no hesitation in saying that this master-mischief is the WAR. Let us see how far we can trace
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the various operating causes of dearth I have touched upon to this source.

I. An Increased Consumption I have shewn to operate in various ways. 1st, By an increased population. This most certainly cannot be attributed to the War; but though war does not create the disease, (if such it can be called) it prevents the operation of the remedy. In Peace the superfluous members of the community would naturally be dispersed into other countries, some of which would now not receive our countrymen, others of which, being the scenes of war and desolation, hold forth no attractions to adventurers. Thus would the too replete Population of the Country (if it exists) find an easy and natural vent.

But the more I consider this Increased Population, the less am I inclined to attribute any great effects to it. The author of "Tracts on the Corn Trade" fixes our exportation of Wheat at 1,652,824 bushels; and Dr. Campbell in 1774 says, "we have, and may continue to have, a more extensive exportation." I have not at this moment the means of verifying the subsequent accounts of our exportation, but I believe it will

will be found that we continued to export corn to the commencement of the present War. Whatever our population then was, it cannot be supposed very considerably to have increased since; and if our consumption has increased, it must be attributed to some other cause. 2dly, The influx of foreigners will cease with the War; they will then, for the most part, return to their own countries. 3dly, The waste and extra-consumption of two hundred thousand additional sailors and soldiers, so evidently belongs to the war, that I will not waste words in proof of it.

II. The second general cause, a Diminished Produce, can certainly not be traced to the War, as far as it is the act of Providence. But this cannot be the chief source of the dearness of corn, because the Duke of Portland expressly tells us, that in the most plentiful years our produce is not equal to our consumption. Yet as it certainly was equal to our consumption before this War, and as War has not in general the effect of much increasing population, it must in some other way have caused this increased consumption.

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If less wheat is grown in consequence of the diminution of the farmer's capital by Taxes, &c. that is clearly the effect of the War.

III. The increased expence of producing the food of man, is occasioned by Taxes; which Taxes are the inevitable consequences of War.

IV. A Monopoly, as far as it is exercised by Government, and its Agents, Contractors, and others connected with them, is induced by the necessity of providing with due foresight for the wants of two hundred thousand sailors and soldiers. This plentiful crop of armed men, has sprung like the teeth of Cadmus's dragon, from the bosom of the same fiend—the present War.

Now we have analysed the poison, the antidote, as I said it would be, is obvious—PEACE. I am well aware that Ministers and their retainers have been in the habit of branding every man, who has attempted to trace our misfortunes to the War, with egregious folly, and detestable wickedness. As to folly, if my positions are true, they cannot be foolish; and as to wickedness, if a wish to restore Peace and Plenty to a war-worn

worn nation, be wickedness, I plead guilty to the charge. But my accusers would do well to consider how far they can justify to their Country, to their Consciences, and to their God, THE MORALITY OF THE SWORD, AND THE WISDOM OF FAMINE.

By abuse and threats of this kind, it has been the policy of Ministers to divert the attention of the people from the true source of their calamities. By anathemas and denunciations of Jacobinism, they have endeavoured to prevent any profane hand from lifting up the "political well-wrought veil" which shrouds the mysterious orgies of their Ministry; and from discovering the hideous forms of Famine, Bankruptcy, and Arbitrary Power, peeping from behind the banners which wave around the shrine of War; to whom have been sacrificed thousands and tens of thousands of human victims. In the service of this grim Idol have also been lavished two hundred millions of money, one of which applied to works of national utility, to the improvement of agriculture, to the cultivation of those tracts which in various parts of the kingdom lie desolate and waste, would have given bread
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to thousands who now want it, and instead of producing, as it now does, Scarcity and War, would have been the fruitful source of Peace and Plenty.

It is Peace alone, I am convinced, that can again restore Plenty to this afflicted Isle ; all other remedies, if adopted as palliatives, will prove aggravations of the evil ; “ they will but skin and film the ulcerous place.”

After having animadverted on the subject of the present scarcity with that freedom which its importance requires, and, without being deterred by their denunciations of folly and wickedness, having traced its source to Ministers ; I am happy in being able to bear my testimony to the wisdom of their present conduct, under the severe pressure of distress which it is too true *they* have occasioned. I trust they will continue to pursue the same firm and temperate line of action, abstaining from all interference with the Corn trade, from whose free and unfettered energy we can only derive a cheap and plentiful subsistence. If they will but suffer this spark to kindle into the light of true wisdom ; if they will follow up this dawn of returning reason, by restoring
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to the Country that Peace which can alone restore its Plenty, they may yet in part atone for those calamities and iniquities with which their Ministry now stands charged. It is incumbent on them to do this, and not to call on the people for privations and sacrifices in order to enable them to carry on the murderous trade of War. There is no privation I would not submit to, no sacrifice of individual comfort I would not cheerfully make, in support of a system which asserted the real interests of my Country ; but when I am called upon to impoverish myself and family, to abridge every domestic comfort, to give up every innocent pleasure and manly recreation, in order to satisfy the demands of a rapacious Minister, *to enrich contractors*, to sap the constitution, and perhaps effect the ruin, of my country, my feelings are outraged, and I submit with indignation and impatience to the infamous and humiliating necessity.

I have said, *to enrich contractors* ; and I beg it may be remarked how much their maintenance and support enhances the price of Corn ; and how diametrically opposite their interest is, to the interest of the people

ple. It is the interest of the contractor that the price of corn should be high ; because as his profits arise by poundage, the greater the sum he expends in corn, the greater, of course, are his profits. Thus is the interest of the contractor ruinous and destructive to the welfare of the nation ; but, with the present War and present Army, Government must employ swarms of these devouring locusts.

As, after what I have said, my voice cannot be thought that of flattery or partiality, let me raise it, feeble as it is, in support of those measures which I cannot but approve. Let me endeavour to dissuade my countrymen from all violent and unjust persecution of farmers and corn-dealers ; let me warn them against all clamorous importunity for that interference which government wisely declines ; and above all, let me intreat them not to suffer the absurd policy of fixing a Maximum on the price of provisions to obtain a place in their thoughts ; lest their mistaken endeavours to alleviate the evils of a scarcity, bring on the miseries of a Famine, the very name and apprehension of which curdles the blood with horror.

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Can it be supposed that when the person and property of the farmer is insecure, he will regularly attend or supply the markets? If even now he is supposed to be remiss in bringing forward his grain, will he be tempted to come oftener, or better furnished, to market, by the prospect of being robbed or murdered on the road? If he is now suspected of concealing his corn, is there not a certainty of his hiding and hoarding, nay, even of his destroying, a commodity, when the possession of it must expose his life to popular fury? If the great price of 40l. per load cannot encourage the growth of sufficient wheat for home consumption, will fixing the Maximum at 20l. be likely to effect it? I submit these considerations with confidence to the impartial and manly sense of my fellow-countrymen.

Perhaps some one may exclaim; "What, are we to sink in silent misery and starve without complaint? Is there no remedy for the evil which oppresses us?" I have before stated that there is a full and substantial remedy; and that PEACE is that remedy. Peace will relieve us from the burthens, the privations, the waste, and lavish prodigality

gality of the present war ; and, if external aid be wanting to restore plenty, will procure for us a share in the abundant harvests which wave on the plains of Belgium, or in the fertile valleys of the Seine and Loire ; importation from our neighbours will afford us whatever is deficient in our own growth, and in the words of Mr. Fox, "our scarcity will be relieved from their abundance."

The remedy therefore, my fellow-countrymen, is in your own hands ; a legal, sufficient, and effectual remedy. A Petition to the Throne for Peace, firm, temperate, and universal, cannot but be attended with success. If Ministers still continue obstinately bent on prolonging this ruinous contest, his Majesty must be humbly implored to exert two of the brightest Prerogatives of his Crown—**MERCY AND JUSTICE**—**MERCY** to the sufferings of his People, by giving them **PEACE** ; and **JUSTICE** to their injuries by dismissing from his Councils the Ministers who have beggared and oppressed them. This is the remedy, my countrymen, to which I desire to point your attention, and earnestly intreat you to direct your exertions ; this is the only remedy that can save

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the country, AND EVEN THIS IF DELAYED
MAY COME TOO LATE.

I conclude, my Lord, by requesting your
indulgence if I have obtruded on your ear
some unwelcome Truths; a sense of Duty
has urged me to these, probably, unavailing
exertions. In the cause of the Public Weal
I have endeavoured to contribute my mite,
and whatever be the event I shall rest satis-
fied with having done so.

I have the honour to remain,

Your Lordship's

Very obedient humble servant,

John Duthy.

ROPLEY, Oct. 30, 1800.

FINIS.

